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ABSTRACT

The use of video taping as a technique to bring villagers into meaningful communication with each other and with government leaders is discussed. Three pilot projects are described: (1) a United Nations funded project in Rajasthan, India; (2) a Tanzanian project involving several villages; and (3) the Skyriver, Alaska project. As demonstrated by these three projects, videotaping technology shows potential for opening direct lines of communication between rural people and government agencies, gives villagers an opportunity to see themselves as part of a community, and raises community activism through participation in the formulation of community problems and solutions. However, the video technology must be part of a systematic process suited to local conditions before it can fulfill its potential. (Author/STS)

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# VIDEO TAPING: A MEDIUM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

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INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY REPORT

## VIDEO TAPING: A MEDIUM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

- *Villagers in India feel government change agents are not helping them, but the change agents disagree and say the villagers do not want help when offered.*
- *In Tanzania villagers believe the regional officials never listen to them because they have done such things as give them funds for a cattle shed but no money to dig a well for the cattle to have water.*
- *Eskimos in Alaska complain about the schools, and about poor house construction while bureaucrats in the state capital say they have heard no complaints about the schools and believe the housing is adequate.*

Despite their geographic and psychological isolation, rural people on the fringe of modernity and government officials working to help them have found a valuable communication link in the use of video tape. In three areas of the world this technology has been instrumental in creating village consciousness and enabled rural people to produce their own messages which were heard by policy and decision makers. Video tape demonstrated its usefulness in stimulating the development process.

### What exactly is video taping?

Portable video tape machines have several distinct characteristics: they are easy to use and control - within a few weeks anyone can handle them confidently; tapes can be erased and reused many times; and they do not require processing before they can be viewed. The technology provides instant feedback - people can see and hear themselves in a matter of seconds. Non-professionals can define their own programs and learn to edit their own tapes quickly and without difficulty; thus video taping can be a participatory medium.

Because video tapes are easy to handle and do not require studio equipment, they are extremely well suited to show people interacting in a dynamic way in their own cultural milieu. The materials thus recorded can provide invaluable insights into people's knowledge, experiences and real needs. The exchange of video tapes as a means of communication between communities, and between people and their government can circumvent mediators who interpret messages according to their own perspectives before sending them on. The video tape medium, therefore, is ideal for most of the world's illiterate villagers who cannot express themselves in script, but can do so in the world of spoken words and visual images.

### Problem areas

Problem areas to be aware of in planning for the use of video tape include:

1) Costs - while the operational costs of video taping equipment are not too high, the initial investment can be expensive. In many cases this cost prohibits the easy access of this technology to villages.

2) Compatibility - the compatibility of the video playback equipment with the tape recorder must be insured so that instant replays are possible. The present lack of standardization of equipment is a real drawback.

3) Use within a total development system - the biggest problem, of course, is to develop a system in which video taping technology and its social application will interface in an optimum way.

### Video taping experience in India

In Rajasthan, a state in India, the United Nations funded a video tape project which began as a television program for villagers. In preparing for this project it was soon discovered that the program would have to focus on people and their problems because villages were highly fragmented along social and cultural lines. Due to factors of caste, wealth and feelings of elitism some villagers had far greater access to the influences of change than others. These villagers exploited their access to change while the less fortunate infrequently gained access to instruments or ideas of change because they usually would be unaware of them.

Therefore, this project was planned to provide these people of Rajasthan with a forum to present their problems by giving them direct access to a modern technology.

Previously villagers had only been exposed to radio or film messages that were produced far from their village. By contrast, the operating credo for this project was that all people can contribute something to improve living and must be given the chance; people are a nation's richest treasure when they are involved in the development process.

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**Video Taping:**
**Medium for Change** *(Continued from page one)*

The procedure of taping was open ended. For instance, a farmer was asked about the lack of wells for irrigation. The ensuing lively conversation was heard by a government change agent. After listening to the conversation, the change agent disputed the farmer's accusation of no loan money being available and wondered why farmers did not use all the government money available to them. All this was captured on tape.

Later, the change agent went to the local village council meeting. When the palaver got to the issue of government loans and programs, a storm of criticism arose from some farmers who complained about the lack of loans. The change agent again said that money was available. All these discussions were caught on the video tape.

Afterwards a filming about "local programs" was scheduled with the change agent, his superior and some villagers. The villagers raised straightforward questions and the government officials disputed them. Subsequently both groups viewed the video tape of the candid conversations and each began to sense the other's real and practical difficulties.

Video taping served here as the mechanism to integrate views of villagers who previously had been rarely in contact with the government change agent. The ideas and complaints of the villagers were heard directly, and their messages were not reinterpreted and passed through intermediate channels before being heard.

As the members of the video taping team saw it, the single most important and immediate contribution of the video process was in making the villagers and government officials aware of the important reasons of their "differences and lack of cooperation."

**Video taping experience in Tanzania**

Believing that "the only way to reflect reality is to participate in it," an international video tape crew arranged with the Tanzanian government in 1971 to live in several villages in order to tape portions of rural life that would show historical and political themes, the dynamics of leadership, economic and social problems.

The tape crew and officials in the capital city were eager to have the video tapes serve as a direct channel of communication between the villagers and the national leaders. The government saw this taping process as "supplementing the information channels by the most democratic means imaginable."

The team developed a good rapport with the villagers and taped most aspects of village living, special events, meetings, discussions and arguments. All video tapes were screened twice a week. The screening generated more discussions which in turn were taped. Through the video taping process the villagers were getting a clear picture of their problems and thus were able to produce their own messages.

The tapes were sent to the capital and viewed by the President himself, by government and party officials as

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## ACROSS THE DIRECTOR'S DESK. . .

In this issue we have concentrated on the simple uses of a sophisticated technology in our discussion of video taping as a technique to bring villagers into meaningful communication with each other and with national leaders. If you know of other projects in which this particular communications technique is being used, we'd appreciate your forwarding the information to enable us to update our survey.

* * *

As you will note, this March issue of the newsletter also includes a brief questionnaire designed to help update the Center's mailing list. We would like to continue sending you *Instructional Technology Report* and other Information Center publications if you find them informative. We do not, however, wish to overload you with printed materials which are of no use to you. We do want to find out how best we can serve each of you by identifying WHO needs WHAT KINDS OF INFORMATION.

If this newsletter and questionnaire has reached you addressed only to a Center or an Institution, we would appreciate your having one individual assume the responsibility of answering it in his own name. The questions have been designed to elicit specific needs of specific individual users. The Institution will continue to be maintained on our mailing list under its own title.

The questionnaire is printed on both sides of each loose sheet enclosed — in Spanish on the green sheet, in French on the blue sheet, and in English on the pink sheet. Please take a few minutes today to answer the questionnaire in the language in which you feel most comfortable.

To insure that you continue to receive our publications without interruption, your completed questionnaire should be returned to us no later than the end of June, 1974. Please help us to help you better!

*Instructional Technology Report*, published bimonthly, is the official newsletter of the Information Center on Instructional Technology. The Center serves as an international clearinghouse for materials and information on important developments in the use of technology for improving education around the world. The Center is operated by the Academy for Educational Development, a private non-profit organization, and is supported by the Bureau for Technical Assistance of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

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well as by university faculty and students. Important government officials responded from the capital on video tape and sent them back to the villagers. In addition the tapes were shown in other villages. In almost every case villagers recognized common difficulties. They entered into debates and all began to learn of the mistakes and accomplishments of others. The video technology established direct links of communication between villages and helped to identify and resolve common problems.

There were direct and prompt payoffs for the villagers from this taping experiment. An unpopular and troublesome agricultural change agent was removed; non-citizen villagers who had been promised citizenship three years previously were granted it; and a cowshed which was built without a water supply and against the villagers' advice was properly funded.

**Video taping experience in Skyriver/Alaska**

A major purpose of the skyriver project was to give Eskimos access to a communication medium which they could use to create a direct channel to the decision-makers in the state capital and Washington.

Prior to introducing video taping into the villages, part of the taping crew lived among the villagers for two and a half years in order to get to know village life through their own experiences and to gain acceptance as friends by the Eskimos. Once the video taping process was utilized, it served as a powerful medium for Eskimos to pull together a consensus on the problems of the present educational system which were not adequately attended to by government officials. Once consensus was established, film was used as the medium of communication between village and the government.

When the film was shown to the highest education officials in the state, its effect was electrifying. The educators had never heard a parent talking at a very practical "gut" level. . . and they had never really heard from a village person before.

The Commissioner of Education replied to the film on video tape. As a result of the filming, education policy was eventually changed to meet the needs of the Eskimos.

Another video tape/film was done on the issue of housing. The complaint was that the housing being constructed was not suited to local conditions. Structural defects of houses were illustrated on film: children ice skating in the kitchen and a room corner being used as a refrigerator to freeze meat. Use of the video medium brought change. The Eskimos' housing situation improved despite a lot of bureaucratic resistance. It was the video material that provided undeniable proof that the problem was real.

**The impact of video taping**

These three projects demonstrated that villagers can use video taping for their own betterment. The medium helped establish new and direct links between villagers and government change agents, and between separate villages. The medium also provided government agents with a greater sense of the real problems of the villagers.

**Changing roles of consumers and producers**

The new video technology can also have more subtle impacts on rural people and government officials. It can be a catalyst for a redefinition of the roles of producer and viewer. Video media specialists discussed these changing roles at a 1972 UNESCO conference in Vichy, France. Max Egly, the conference rapporteur, sees a "democratization" of media when the consumer (the villager in the above examples) plays an active role in the medium's message formation and when he learns that production of tapes is not beyond his capability.

At the same time the role of video tape producer changes. The new producer of video material does not intend to make a cinema verite. Instead he helps the new consumers to gain familiarity ("demystification" as coined by Egly) with the video technology and to use this technology to present their ideas coherently. In short, the new producer will serve as the catalyst for community action. To succeed in this role however he must have a great deal of empathy for the new consumers.

**New roles at Skyriver**

A good example of this redefinition of roles is given in Skyriver project where the film maker became a community organizer. His job was to guide people in "producing" their own films. This required him to be sensitive to the villagers and their problems as well as to have the professional skills of a film producer.

A flexible process was followed in creating the product. At first, villagers were made familiar with the video hardware and its use. The initial glamor of video taping drew people to screen themselves and relatives. Gradually it was observed that factions of the community which previously had had little communication among each other began to coalesce when the screenings showed that they had a lot of problems in common. The big generation gap between the elders and youth was narrowed as people began to see their many common bonds. In addition, the screenings served as a safety valve because individuals could react with strong emotions to a visual image on a screen which they could not do in a face-to-face situation.

During the long process of shooting and screening video tapes, people gradually began to form a consensus around "their" problem. Once a consensus was established, a local opinion leader was chosen. He was responsible for organizing the community, directing the filming crew, and interviewing villagers for the film. It was here that video taping ended and filming began.

Video taping was however used again. When the film was shown to government officials and other Eskimo communities, the viewers' reactions were recorded on video tape. Thus the filming village got messages back quickly. This feedback from the video tapes proved to be a powerful tool in maintaining a high level of community involvement and enthusiasm in dealing with community problems.

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**Video Taping:**
**Medium for Change** *(Continued from page three)*

Community involvement was also high because each person had the final say on the editing of his or her role in the film. Each villager determined the physical setting for his interview and the language to be spoken. Overall, the final film product was built on true consensus of the community with the solutions proposed.

The video tapes were made based on the principles of "demystification and democratization." The Eskimos felt that they could control some aspects of their environment and that they had a say in the shaping of their future. This process also gave the Eskimos a sense of community where before there had been none.

The continuation of video taping and community action looks promising for the Skyriver communities. "Their" community activist-producer had always seen his role as temporary, to be terminated when local members of the community were trained to carry on the program. At Skyriver this point has been reached.

**Summary**

As demonstrated by these three pilot projects, video taping technology:

- shows great potential for opening direct lines of communication between rural people and government agencies;
- gives villagers the opportunity to see themselves as part of a community;
- raises community activism through dynamic participation in the formulation of community problems and their solutions;
- appears a highly suitable medium for the new consumers and producers to use to develop their messages.

The projects show that villagers have strong feelings about what their problems are and how they can best be served. The tapes clearly indicate that planners and administrators rarely consider the points of view of the villagers because they seem to feel they know best and believe that the villagers have little to say on the matter. All three projects show conclusively that villagers can grow animated about their problems when given the chance and can come up with useful suggestions.

The Skyriver, Tanzania and Rajasthan experiments show that video tape technology can help bridge the gaps between government and citizenry, urban and rural, and rich and poor. However, the technology in and of itself offers no panaceas and no breakthroughs. As is the case with any other technology, before video technology can be useful to villagers throughout a country, much effort will be needed to design and implement the systematic processes that fit each local condition. Most importantly, if video taping is really to help, the social and political climate must be such that innovation will be welcomed by a leadership whose motivation to change is strong and whose determination to succeed in meeting the real needs of rural people is unlimited.

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